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Conquering Sickness

Mark Allan Goldberg

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Conquering Sickness

Race, Health, and Colonization in the Texas Borderlands

MARK ALLAN GOLDBERG

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For Lisa, Leo, and Sylvie

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A Note on Racial and Ethnic Terminology

Because Texas was a meeting place for diverse peoples in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I employ a range of racial and ethnic terminology in this study. When possible, I use the terms that subjects of this study used to describe themselves. However, the primary sources on which I rely do not always allow me to do so. This study assumes that race is a historical and social creation in which individuals are positioned and position themselves as belonging to particular groups. This process of racialization is ideologically driven, such that some social categories (white, Spanish) historically have been seen as normative while other categories (black, Indian) have been marked as exceptional and inferior. As a result, racial and ethnic labels are rarely adequate in fully explaining how people experienced the past and conceived of themselves.

For the Spanish era, I use the terms "Spanish" and "Spaniard" to describe subjects of the crown who claimed Spanish descent. Because these labels derive from the ways that individuals related to their contemporaries, "Spanish" also refers to colonial subjects who differentiated themselves from Native peoples. According to colonial officials, missionaries, and ordinary Spanish colonists, Indians who did not practice Catholicism and did not adopt Spanish customs were not Spanish. In New Spain, Spanish men greatly outnumbered Spanish women. These men often had sex with indigenous women, doing so along a continuum that ranged from rape to lasting intimate relationships, including marriage. By the mid-seventeenth century, mestizos, or people of mixed

Spanish Indian parentage, outnumbered Spaniards in New Spain.[1] In addition, slave traders brought some 200,000 Africans into New Spain during the colonial era.[2] Concerned with race and status, the Spanish developed a *casta* system that delineated racial categories, including the mixed progeny of *españoles* (Spaniards), *indios* (Indians), and *negros* (blacks). In northern New Spain, the most popular label for people of Spanish descent was "Spaniard," even though most people who claimed this term for themselves were probably mixed race. This reflected the demography of the frontier, where the Spanish population was small, where both intercultural relationships and sexual violence were frequent, and, as a result, where racial identities were more fluid.

Following Mexican independence in 1821, the use of the label "Spaniard" declined. In Mexican Texas, individuals sometimes claimed more than one racial-ethnic identifier, such as Mexican, mestizo, Spanish, and Tejano (Mexican Texan), depending on the context.[3] I use the term "Spanish Mexican" to describe people in the immediate post-independence period in Mexico, since national identities changed gradually during the transition from Spanish colony to Mexican nation-state. In 1820s Texas, Spanish Mexicans began to assert their ethnicity in relation to the growing English-speaking, U.S.-born population. According to Mexico's colonization law, these newcomers had to become naturalized citizens, so both they and their Spanish Mexican neighbors technically were Mexican nationals. Spanish Mexicans, therefore, began to differentiate themselves ethnically from U.S. immigrants, embracing a Tejana/o identity.[4] The words "Tejana" and "Tejano," moreover, denote the local character of Mexican national and ethnic identity; my use of the terms reflects this historical reality. Finally, I use the term "Mexican American" to refer to U.S. legal citizens of Mexican descent and "ethnic Mexican" to refer to all Mexicans regardless of their legal citizenship status.[5] The U.S.-Mexico border was ambiguous and in flux during much of the period under study, and borderland cultures were hybrids that incorporated values and practices from the diverse residents of both the United States and Mexico. Even when the two nations defined a boundary in the mid-nineteenth century, peoples and ideas continued to cross that border. Thus I employ the term "ethnic Mexican" particularly when examining cross-cultural exchanges that transcended national borders.

I also employ a variety of terms to refer to the indigenous peoples of Texas. My use of ethnohistorical methods to recover Native history from European and European American sources shapes the racial and ethnic terminology for this study. With an eye to the limitations of this

methodology, I refer to Native peoples in the ways that the sources suggest they referred to themselves—for example, as Comanches, Karankawas, Apaches, Caddos, and Xaranames. Such labels are also ethnic constructs, for these were not closed communities. The existence of a substantial mestizo population demonstrates that racial mixing occurred frequently in the region. Moreover, Comanches often incorporated non-Comanche captives into their bands, creating multiethnic communities. Sometimes I examine Native peoples in the aggregate—for example, when I explore Spanish, Mexican, or U.S. Indian policy. In such cases, I use the terms "Native peoples," "indigenous peoples," and "Indians" interchangeably.

When I speak of white, English-speaking migrants to Texas from the United States, I most often use the term "Anglo." The word "Anglo" is short for "Anglo-American," a term that since the late eighteenth century has sometimes been used to distinguish U.S.-born whites from American Indians and later (and more commonly now) from ethnic Mexicans. "Anglo-American" is closely associated with a racial term popular among nineteenth-century white Americans of English and Germanic roots: "Anglo-Saxon." Anglo-Saxon racial ideology shaped ideas of U.S. exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny.[6] But "Anglo-American" and "Anglo-Saxon" are not identical in meaning, nor do they share exactly the same history. I use the terms "Anglo" and "Anglo-American" in a broadly descriptive sense and especially in opposition to terms like "Spanish Mexican" and "Mexican American." I do not use the word "Anglo" narrowly to refer to people of English descent. Though it is a term that rests uneasily when applied to some European immigrants and European Americans, it is nonetheless historically descriptive of a racialized divide that developed in Texas and the rest of the U.S. Southwest as English-speaking whites poured in and worked to establish dominance over ethnic Mexicans. But whiteness was complicated and contested in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Texas. I occasionally use the term "white" to refer to the position of elite Spaniards in the colonial socioracial hierarchy, and some ethnic Mexicans claimed whiteness but still experienced social, political, and economic marginalization. When Anglos first arrived in Texas in the 1820s and 1830s, moreover, Anglo elites developed a mutually beneficial relationship with Tejana/o elites that blurred racial and ethnic boundaries.[7] Whiteness was central to Anglo identity. But when analyzing race relations, I mostly use "Anglo" instead of "white" because of its historical resonance in Texas and the Southwest. Whiteness alone—because some elite and light-skinned Mexicans could claim it,

at least provisionally—did not determine power and prestige in mid-nineteenth-century Texas.[8]

People of African descent, by contrast, could virtually never claim the privileges of whiteness. Historians of the African diaspora have shown us that African Americans constituted an ethnically diverse group.[9] During the colonial era, the African slave trade in New Spain and British America helped create what Gary Nash calls "mestizo America."[10] The black population in Spanish Texas, however, was small. By the nineteenth century, most people of African descent who lived in Texas had come as slaves from the southern United States or through the domestic slave trade, and a small percentage came through the illegal African trade. Southern blacks descended from a variety of African-origin peoples as well as from mixing with Europeans, European Americans, and Native peoples and, of course, among themselves. Despite this diversity, however, the one-drop rule of U.S. southern racial ideology reinforced an idea of monolithic blackness, which is evident in nineteenth-century Anglo-American sources.[11] I also reference the Works Progress Administration slave narratives, which were shaped by twentieth-century U.S. racial tropes. Nevertheless, I use the terms "African American" and "black" to refer to people of African descent in Texas.

All racial and ethnic terminology is a product of history and hence by definition is not only unstable but also caught up in systems of hierarchy. The terms I employ, nonetheless, reflect ways that diverse peoples constructed identities in relation to others. And while imagined, the boundaries that Texas residents created to separate themselves from their neighbors produced real consequences.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Texas-Mexico borderlands. Map by Joshua Been.